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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 12/08/08

INDEX:

- (1) Poll: Public support for Aso cabinet plunges by half to 21 PERCENT (Yomiuri)
- (2) DPJ executive desperately trying to cap internal strains over Diet strategy, super-grand coalition idea (Nikkei)
- (3) Budget compilation: Three challenges -- local tax allocations, social security spending and special budget framework: Coordination entering crucial stage (Nikkei)
- (4) Defense Ministry to request 100 billion yen for USFJ realignment (Yomiuri)
- (5) Interview with Governor Hirokazu Nakaima on his second anniversary; Okinawa promotion law and promotion plan to be reviewed (Okinawa Times)
- (6) TOP HEADLINES
- (7) EDITORIALS
- (8) Prime Minister's schedule, December 5 (Nikkei)

ARTICLES:

- (1) Poll: Public support for Aso cabinet plunges by half to 21 PERCENT

YOMIURI (Top Play) (Full)
December 8, 2008

Public support for the Aso cabinet plummeted by almost half from the 40.5 PERCENT in the previous survey in early November to 20.9 PERCENT, according to the latest nationwide telephone survey conducted on Dec. 5-7 by Yomiuri Shimbun. Meanwhile, disapproval rating jumped about 25 percentage points to 66.7 PERCENT. Asked which is preferable as prime minister, Prime Minister Aso or Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ozawa, only 29 PERCENT of respondents picked Aso, down 21 points from the previous survey, while 36 PERCENT chose Ozawa, up 14 points. The support rate for Aso fell below the figure for Ozawa for the first time. Aso scored an overwhelming victory in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election, given his high popularity. The survey showed that the "effect of freshness" has faded out in only about two months. Greatly shocked by the survey results, some LDP members might begin to call for the prime minister to be replaced, or moves might be afoot to form a new political party.

Aso losing political ground further

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura yesterday commented on the steep dive in public support for the Aso cabinet: "These are very severe figures for us. We should take the survey results as intended to encourage us and include satisfactory economic stimulus measures in the second supplementary budget bill for fiscal 2008 and in the budget bill for fiscal 2009. LDP Secretary General Hosoda stated before reporters yesterday: "The outcome is really regrettable. I expect (the support rate) to begin to climb once the public understand our measures to create jobs and to buoy the economy." Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima said: "A string of

TOKYO 00003334 002 OF 012

remarks (critical of the prime minister) by LDP members can be considered to have plunged public support."

New Komeito President Ota commented yesterday: "It is important for the prime minister to demonstrate leadership and reveal what he really wants to do."

Many ruling party members cite Aso's credentials as prime minister as one of the major reasons for the poor survey results, for instance, his trouble with reading kanji. A close aide to Aso stated yesterday: "There are no effective steps to raise the support rating of the cabinet. It is the sole way for the government to show to the public its determination to make steady effort." Even so, the prime minister's political strength will inevitably be dampened further in the future.

Keeping in mind the fact that former prime ministers Abe and Fukuda stepped down in about one year after the launch of their cabinets, a junior LDP Lower House member said: "Even if the LDP tries to overcome the current tough situation by holding a LDP presidential election to replace prime minister, the party will not be able to obtain public support." But an LDP member who once served as a cabinet minister remarked: "It might be unavoidable for prime minister to be replaced as the support rating of his cabinet has dived to this level."

Appearing on a Fuji TV program yesterday, Hidenao Nakagawa, former LDP secretary general, replied when asked how he plans to address political realignment and to form a new political party: "It is premature to make any comment. I will make a judgment after thorough deliberations."

The government and the ruling camp intend to adjourn the current Diet session at the end of the session on Dec. 25 and convene an ordinary Diet session on Jan. 5. They hope to enact the second extra budget bill and related bills at an early date and then to force the fiscal 2009 budget bill through the Diet by the end of this fiscal year. But the DPJ is poised to oppose the supplementary budget bill. Heated negotiations are expected in the Diet.

Ozawa gains more support as preferable premier

In the latest survey, the support rating of the Aso cabinet was below the critical 30 PERCENT line into the level considered

dangerous and was even lower than the 28.3 PERCENT for the Fukuda cabinet in its last days marked in Yomiuri survey by direct interview in August.

As for the reasons given for not supporting the Aso cabinet, 32 PERCENT of respondents said they did not have any expectations about his policies, followed by 29 PERCENT who cited a lack of leadership (9 PERCENT in the previous survey), and 25 PERCENT who listed a lack of stability of the cabinet (13 PERCENT in the previous survey). The survey results showed that disappointment among the public at Aso's competence as prime minister was a major cause for the large drop in public support.

Voters also severely evaluated the economic stimulus measures the cabinet had mapped out on a top priority basis, with 83 PERCENT saying that the cabinet has not properly dealt with the current economic situation and with 67 PERCENT defining as inappropriate the government's decision to put off the submission of a second

TOKYO 00003334 003 OF 012

extra budget bill to sometime after early next year. The survey also found that 77 PERCENT see a string of gaffes and controversial remarks by Aso have negatively affected the administration of government.

Asked which party they would vote for in the next House of Representatives election, 27.2 PERCENT chose the LDP (down 5.2 points from the previous poll), 28.2 PERCENT said they supported the DPJ (up 4.8 points). Asked which party they would vote for in the proportional representation ballot, 40 PERCENT favored for the DPJ and 24 PERCENT for the LDP. This marked the first time since the launch of the Aso cabinet for the DPJ has surpassed the LDP.

In response to a question about what administration they think should be formed after the Lower House election, 33 PERCENT replied that a new framework should be formed through political realignment, followed by 25 PERCENT suggesting a grand coalition between the LDP and the DPJ. With 21 PERCENT proposing forming a coalition centered on the DPJ and 12 PERCENT for a coalition centered on the LDP, the survey results revealed that about 60 PERCENT of the voters are seeking a new type of politics going beyond the framework of choosing the LDP or the DPJ.

On the timing for Lower House dissolution for a general election, 36 PERCENT suggested early next year and 22 PERCENT called for prompt dissolution, with about 60 PERCENT urging the government to dissolve the Lower House at an early date. In the previous survey, 22 PERCENT cited around next spring, and 14 PERCENT listed sometime by the time of the Lower House members' terms of office expiring next September. But the numbers of those who picked these replies significantly decreased.

(2) DPJ executive desperately trying to cap internal strains over Diet strategy, super-grand coalition idea

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 8, 2008

Strains are beginning to appear in the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which has taken the offensive to topple the government of Prime Minister Taro Aso. Some DPJ members in the House of Councillors are critical about the management of Diet affairs by Chairman Azuma Koshiishi and other executive members. Some are wondering about the true intention of President Ichiro Ozawa, who advocates a super-grand coalition vision to launch a caretaker government of ruling and opposition parties to deal with a general election. The party leadership is desperately trying to nip the problem in the bud.

"Something is wrong with the Upper House leadership's way of dealing with matters," Toshimi Kitazawa, a DPJ vice president, who chairs the Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said on the night of Dec. 4 to Upper House members who were elected for the first time to the Diet in 2007. They were meeting at a Chinese restaurant in Tokyo.

Koshiishi and other executive members are reluctant to take a tactic of boycotting deliberations in the current Diet session. Many in the DPJ Upper House are looking with suspicion on a development in which such senior members as Kitazawa, Hajime Ishii and Takeshi Maeda will lose their chances to score points during the ongoing extended Diet session. Also such junior members as Harunobu Yonenaga, Kuniko

TOKYO 00003334 004 OF 012

Tanioka and Kusuo Oshima made special requests in a general meeting and other occasions.

Although the DPJ has formed a joint parliamentary group with the People's New Party (PNP) and New Party Nippon (NPN), creating the largest group in the Upper House, the PNP has recently often tried to force its assertions on the DPJ in managing Diet affairs and coordinating elections by hinting the threat of dissolving the parliamentary group. Some DPJ members are unhappy with the party leadership for giving too much consideration to the PNP.

Koshiishi and other executives will hold meetings this week with groups based on the number of times they lawmakers were elected to the Upper House. They intend to strengthen intra-party unity by listening to views on managing the party. But a mid-level member said: "They are just trying to ease discontent." Some senior members who have distanced themselves from Ozawa have expressed concern about his super-grand coalition vision, with one saying: "Mr. Ozawa has not yet given up on the idea of a grand coalition with the LDP."

The super-grand coalition vision means that if Prime Minister Aso resigns in the next ordinary session under the condition that he will carry out an early Lower House election for a snap election, the DPJ will agree to form a caretaker government made up of all parties to deal with the snap election. The super-grand coalition notion spread quickly after Ozawa mentioned it in a meeting on the night of Nov. 28 with Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama and NPN leader Yasuo Tanaka.

Meeting with strong opposition from within his party, Ozawa gave up on the idea of a grand coalition with the LDP, even though he and then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda had agreed to it during a meeting. Many junior and mid-level members who want political change have yet to get over their "allergy" to such a notion.

The DPJ leadership is struggling to find ways to stave off turmoil. In a meeting on Nov. 30 of the 'Next Cabinet,' Hatoyama said:

"It is a misunderstanding that the grand-coalition notion will be revived. A caretaker government will aim to deal only with a general election to the last. The notion was come up in the process of forming a DPJ-led government."

At a press conference on Nov. 4, Deputy President Naoto Kan explained that Ozawa becoming prime minister is a condition for a caretaker government to deal with a general election. Ozawa's hold over the party remains strong, but tools to shake the party's unity still remain in place.

(3) Budget compilation: Three challenges -- local tax allocations, social security spending and special budget framework: Coordination entering crucial stage

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
December 7, 2008

The government has decided to raise the state contribution to the basic pension, one of the pending issues concerning the compilation of the fiscal 2009 budget, starting in April next year as originally planned. Coordination of views in the government and the ruling camp over the budget compilation will enter a crucial stage this week.

TOKYO 00003334 005 OF 012

However, where a settlement can be found for an increase in local tax allocations and a constraint on social security spending is not

yet in sight. Since pressure for an increase in budget allocations from the ruling parties is strong with the next Lower House election close at hand, there is a possibility of a special budget framework plan, which has been a lingering notion in the ruling camp, gaining momentum once again.

An increase in local tax allocations will likely be the last issue to be settled. Prime Minister Taro Aso originally took the stance of transferring 1 trillion yen drawn from freed up special road-purpose revenues to local governments. This developed into a dispute over whether the money should be distributed in the form of local tax allocations or subsidies in the government and the ruling parties.

The Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) project team decided to categorize a large portion of the 1 trillion yen as subsidies for exclusive use for road construction. Six local bodies and the Internal Affairs Ministry, which are seeking convenient local tax allocations, have begun calling for an increase of 1 trillion yen in a separate framework.

In that case, however, the government will have to raise resources to fund subsidies by issuing deficit-covering government bonds. The Finance Ministry, which wants to constrain the issuance of new government bonds as much as possible, is strongly opposing the idea.

A policy of constraining the growth of social security spending by 22 billion yen a year is also stumbling. The Finance Ministry and the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry (MHLW) intend to constrain the growth by 22 billion yen, funded by an increase in the tobacco tax. A 3 yen rise per cigarette or 60 yen per packet is expected to bring about a revenue increase of about 100 billion yen. It is possible to reduce the amount of constraint in proportion to that. However, many LDP members are strongly opposing the proposal out of consideration to leaf tobacco growers.

The amount of constraint on social security spending will increase, if the margin of a rise in tobacco prices becomes small. The Finance Ministry wants to cut back on social security spending by reducing the state contribution to the employment insurance, which receives 160 billion yen. However, the MHLW and the ruling parties are strongly opposing a cut in social security spending. The rapid deterioration in the employment situation is working as a negative factor.

The special framework worth over 10 trillion yen, an initiative suddenly surfaced in the government and the ruling parties, is also lingering, though it lost steam in the ruling camp, as no specific proposal has been made. However, since the basic policy for the budget compilation incorporated the words that a decisive response will be made in a timely and flexible way, according to circumstances, there is still room left for the issue to reemerge.

The Finance Ministry denied the special framework plan with one official noting, "We have not heard about such a proposal." It is alarmed about a possible call for a budgetary increase at the last minute.

(4) Defense Ministry to request 100 billion yen for USFJ realignment

TOKYO 00003334 006 OF 012

YOMIURI (Internet edition) (Full)
December 8, 2008

In compiling its fiscal 2009 draft budget, the Defense Ministry has decided to request approximately 100 billion yen in total outlays for the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan that will be implemented starting in fiscal year 2009. The ministry has started prior coordination with the Finance Ministry. This was revealed today by a government source.

Since this greatly exceeds this fiscal year's allocation (for USFJ realignment) of 19.1 billion yen, the focus of coordination now within the government and ruling camp will be on whether to treat

the request as a defense budget expenditure as before, or place it under a special framework.

Breaking down the 100 billion yen request, approximately 40 to 50 billion yen will be allocated as expenditures to develop approximately 300 hectares of land for construction of billeting for the Marines and to build their headquarters on U.S. Navy land on Guam. This project is in connection with the relocation of U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam. In addition, in connection with the relocation of the Marines' Futenma Air Station (Ginowan City, Okinawa Prefecture) to the coastal area of Camp Schwab (Nago City in the same prefecture), the ministry is requesting over 20 billion yen for such work as destroying the existing structures and developing the land. Accompanying the stationing of carrier-based jets to Iwakuni base (Iwakuni City in Yamaguchi Prefecture), it is estimated that over 20 billion yen will be needed for constructing parking spots and hangars on the base.

The Finance Ministry has taken a stance of seeking defense-related cuts in such areas as the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) equipment budget and constraining USFJ realignment outlays themselves. It has positioned the realignment funds as just another part of the entire defense budget. The Defense Ministry has cited that the realignment plan has been agreed on between Japan and United States, and it is concerned that there could be an impact on the Defense Program Outline, which is planned for revision at the end of next year. It is advocating that the funding come from a special framework.

(5) Interview with Governor Hirokazu Nakaima on his second anniversary; Okinawa promotion law and promotion plan to be reviewed

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 3) (Full)
December 6, 2008

December 10 marks the second anniversary of the assumption of office by Governor Hirokazu Nakaima. Ahead of the commemorative event, the governor has given an interview to news companies, including the Okinawa Times, in which he discussed the U.S. base issue, an outlook for industrial development and other matters.

(Katsutoshi Hamamoto of the political and economic department as the interviewer)

-- Based on progress in your campaign pledges, what is your assessment of the management of the prefectural administration over the last two years?

TOKYO 00003334 007 OF 012

"I think we have been able to get started some 95 PERCENT of 14 policy targets and 170 concrete policies, including administrative and fiscal reform. We must leave the assessment to the Okinawa public."

-- Talks on the relocation of Futenma Air Station with the central government have now stalled.

"I would like to see a convincing plan that incorporates as many local views as possible; that's my basic stance. (The governments of Japan and the United States) need to firmly embrace (local) opinions on moving the envisaged replacement facility to an offshore area and on the environmental impact assessment."

-- Many in the Japanese and U.S. governments are dismissive of moving the replacement facility offshore.

"The governor has the power to authorize landfill work for using surface areas. After hearing experts' views on the environmental assessment, there is a possibility that the option of moving the site to the western side rather than offshore will emerge. It is natural to move it from the residential area to an offshore area. Although there is the basic agreement and restrictions, I believe we have been able to crosscheck our views at the talks."

-- Effectively closing down Futenma Air Station in three years was

your campaign pledge. What is the prospect for it?

"I think it is possible to effectively close down the air station. The chances of risks can be halved with the transfer of some 50 helicopters, halving the training menus, and other means. The working team has been making moves. I would like to see the group come up with a direction of effectively closing down the air station while producing an answer each time and implementing them."

-- Is it possible to pursue industrial promotion and the unemployment rate to match the national levels?

"Industrial promotion consists of supporting industries in the prefecture and attracting enterprises (to the prefecture). IT-centered advance into the prefecture has not lost momentum. We are endeavoring to lure companies from such countries as South Korea, Taiwan, and America. The prefectural government also supports carefully and steadfastly corporate efforts for developing new technologies, change in business activities, and advance into new areas."

"The niche market in Okinawa can offer unlimited opportunities not only to home appliances and automobiles but also to the manufacturing industry as a whole. I believe we can lower the unemployment rate to the national level and even result in a labor shortage by picking up such projects carefully and persistently. We pin hopes on ANA's international cargo base concept, thinking it can help jumpstart the economy."

-- Tourism is going strong, but there are objections to the casino plan.

"There are both positive and negative aspects to the casino plan. The question is how we can minimize the negative aspects. I believe there is a need to produce new tourist programs by combining Okinawa's transitional performing arts, natural environment, and

TOKYO 00003334 008 OF 012

casinos."

-- The Law on Special Measures for the Promotion and Development of Okinawa is slated to expire in 2011.

"Starting next April, the existing Okinawa promotion law and the Okinawa promotion plan will be overhauled centering on the planning department. Even if the contents of the special measures and high-rate subsidies are to be narrowed down, they must be continued. In particular, in order to purify the environment surrounding sites previously used by the U.S. military and to turn them into a driving force for the industry and economy, some sort of support from the central government is necessary."

Conflict with opposition bloc intensifying in prefectural assembly

The opposition and ruling blocs traded their positions in the prefectural assembly election in June that handed down a decision on the Nakaima prefectural administration. With the confrontation intensifying in the opposition-controlled assembly, steering the prefectural administration is becoming taxing.

In the regular September assembly session, a budgetary plan to fund the governor's trip to the United States was voted down. In November, the regular session stalled from the outset over the prefectural government's litigation over the Naha District Court's decision on the Awase reclamation project. The opposition bloc is set to make a decision in the upcoming proportional and regular interpellations on a resubmitted budgetary plan to finance the governor's U.S. trip. A second rejection of the plan would deal a serious blow to Gov. Nakaima, causing him to lose some grip on power.

The ruling camp has positively assessed the governor, with one saying: "He has been spearheading efforts to increase jobs, tourism, and attract industries." The ruling camp agrees on the view that (Gov. Nakaima) has taken solid steps centering on economic policy. At the same time, given the global financial crisis and

deteriorating business confidence, the ruling bloc is urging Nakaima to have a sense of crisis, with one saying: "The true worth of 'Nakaima of the economy' is being tested."

In the next Lower House election, it is essential for the ruling parties to band together centering on Nakaima. The ruling bloc has made a request to the minority prefectural government, with one noting, "Not only Gov. Nakaima but also senior prefectural government officials are not aware of the gravity of the situation. In dealing with the assembly, they must take finely-tuned measures in concert with the ruling parties."

Meanwhile, the opposition bloc has criticized Nakaima, with one noting: "The governor has yet to deliver on his campaign pledges, such as lowering the jobless rate to the national level and closing down Futenma Air Station in three years."

The representative of a certain political group has pointed out an awkward atmosphere surrounding the U.S. base issue, saying: "The manner has been provocative as seen in the announcement of the prefectural government's view conflicting with the prefectural assembly's stance. The prefectural government does not have a handle on the opposition camp's points on the governor's U.S. trip." The prefectural government's failure to submit a resolution on its

TOKYO 00003334 009 OF 012

litigation against the Awase reclamation project has also drawn criticism as slighting the prefectural assembly.

One has expressed this severe view: "He has been pushing ahead with the structural reform drive since the Koizumi administration, the collapsed U.S. force realignment plan, and useless public works projects. His arbitrary political approach has been a problem." The confrontation is expected to intensify further in the regular prefectural assembly session in February that will discuss the fiscal 2009 prefectural budget.

Gov. Nakaima, now in the second half of his term, is pressed to clarify his strategy for his reelection and to produce solid track records. Given the need to come up with measures against the prefectural assembly and to build a consensus in the ruling bloc and business circles, the focus will be on how he will revamp the setup, including the vice-governor.

(6) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi:
Support rate for Aso cabinet plunges to 22 PERCENT

Mainichi & Yomiuri:
Cabinet support rate at 21 PERCENT

Nikkei:
Nikkei research team calls for improving pension disadvantages of young people

Sankei:
Chicago now most likely candidate for 2016 Olympics

Tokyo Shimbun:
Four to five courts found to have ordered to freeze bank accounts allegedly used for bank transfer scams

Akahata:
Possibility of many people aged 75 or older not receiving insurance card next year

(7) EDITORIALS

Asahi:
(1) Postal privatization: Politics, management preventing reform
(2) Relief of Minamata disease patients: How far will dual standards left as they are?

Mainichi:
(1) Plummeting cabinet support ratings: Public no long willing to

entrust political reins to Prime Minister Aso
(2) Smoking room incident: Society's tolerance being questioned (by Kenji Miki)

Yomiuri:

- (1) Bring back taxi regulations: Taxi industry must work toward optimal balance
- (2) High school entrance exam: How to accept problem students

Nikkei:

- (1) Pension system reform and economic stimulus measures should be simultaneously carried out

TOKYO 00003334 010 OF 012

Sankei:

- (1) Pursue responsibility for pension-record mess as crime
- (2) Ban on use of cell phones at schools: Strict rules at homes required

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1) Revenues from road-related taxes: Government, ruling coalition will change the policy of freeing up tax revenues earmarked for road for the worse
- (2) Contaminated rice: Agriculture Ministry must first change

Akahata:

- (1) 67th anniversary of Pacific War: Japan must reflect on aggressive war

(8) Prime Minister's schedule, December 5

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 6, 2008

07:01

Took a walk around the private residence in Kamaiyama-cho

09:33

Cabinet meeting in the Diet building. Finance Minister Nakagawa remained.

09:56

Met with Japanese Communist Party Chair Person Shii. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura was present.

10:20

Met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Minister Matsumoto at the Kantei.

11:31

Met with UN Development Fund for Women Executive Director Alverdi and others, followed by Matsumoto.

12:54

Stood talking with Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Nikaido.

13:00

Lower House Budget Committee meeting.

17:44

Stood talking with Lower House member Akira Kasai.

18:01

Met with LDP and New Komeito Policy Research Council Chairmen Hori and Yamaguchi and Chairman Kawasaki of the ruling parties' project team on new employment measures at the Kantei. Kawamura was present. Hori and Kawamura remained.

18:44

Met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Uruma.

19:40

Met with NTT Chairman Wada and President Miura at a Japanese restaurant in Hotel New Ohtani.

TOKYO 00003334 011 OF 012

20:37

Met with Lower House Speaker Kono and Justice Minister Mori at a restaurant at Akasaka.

21:43

Returned to the private residence.

Prime Minister's schedule, December 6

December 7, 2008

07:33

Took a walk around the private residence in Kamiyama-cho.

10:45

Left Haneda Airport by ANA 249. Deputy Secretary General Hayashi accompanied.

12:30

Arrived at Fukuoka Airport.

13:38

Left Fukuoka Airport by ANA 4917.

14:10

Arrived at Goto-Fukue Airport.

14:30

Made a sidewalk speech in Minato Park in Goto City, Nagasaki Prefecture.

15:18

Inspected kindergarten Himawari Room.

15:44

Inspected shrimp harvest in front of Goto Fukue Fisheries Cooperative Association.

16:03

Inspected Sakaguchi cattle barn.

16:18

Inspected Honcho shopping street.

16:36

Encouraged Midorigaoka Elementary School Basketball Team members at Fukue Primary School.

16:58

Met with Nagasaki Prefectural Governor Kaneko and Goto City Mayor Nakao at Lower House member Yaichi Tanigawa's office.

18:04

Left Goto-Fukue Airport by Oriental Air Bridge 320.

18:25

Arrived at Nagasaki Airport.

19:40

Speech meeting at Moriyama Sports Exchange Hall in Isahaya City.

21:25

TOKYO 00003334 012 OF 012

Met with Tanigawa and former Defense Minister Kyuma at Unzen Kyusyu Hotel in Unzen City. Stayed at the hotel overnight.

Prime Minister's schedule, December 7

December 8, 2008

07:30

Met with Deputy Secretary General Hayashi at Unzen Kyushu Hotel in Unzen City, Nagasaki Prefecture.

08:06

Met with proprietresses of Unzen Hot Spring and Obama Hot Spring at Hyakunen Dining, a restaurant in the same hotel.

09:37

Laid wreath at a monument commemorating Mt. Fugendake Disaster in Shimabara City.

10:59

Left Kuchinotsu Port in Minami-Shimabara City by Shimatetsu Ferry.

11:28

Arrived at Oniike Port in Amakusa City, Kumamoto Prefecture.

12:05

Met with Amakusa City Mayor Yasuda at a restaurant in Hotel Alegria Gardens Amakusa in Amakusa City. Then met with members of the local junior chamber.

14:29

Speech meeting at Chapel Garden in the same hotel.

17:34

Made a sidewalk speech in the Kengun Shopping Mall in Kumamoto City.

18:05

Met with Upper House member Hitoshi Kimura at a Japanese restaurant in Kumamoto City.

20:15

Left Kumamoto Airport by ANA 650.

21:27

Arrived at Haneda Airport.

22:00

Met with his secretary at Haneda Airport

23:50

Arrived at the private residence in Kamiyama-cho.

SCHIEFFER